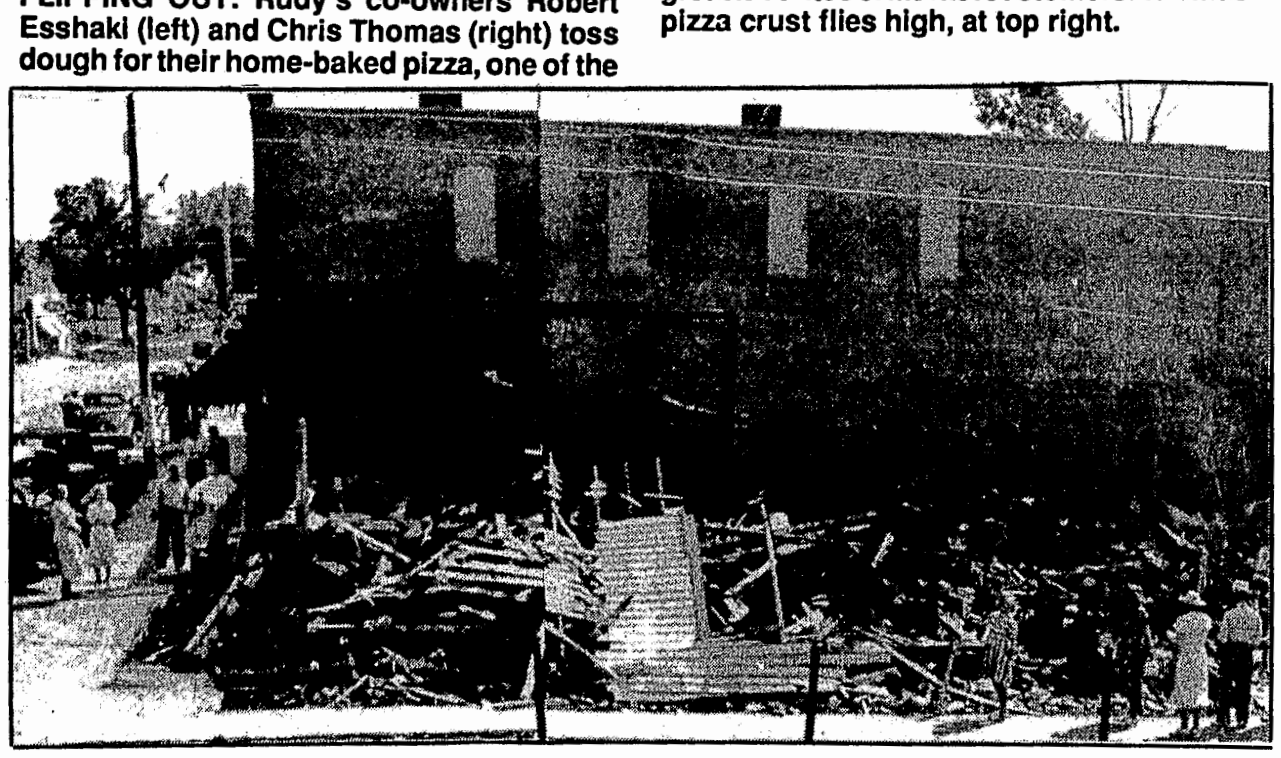
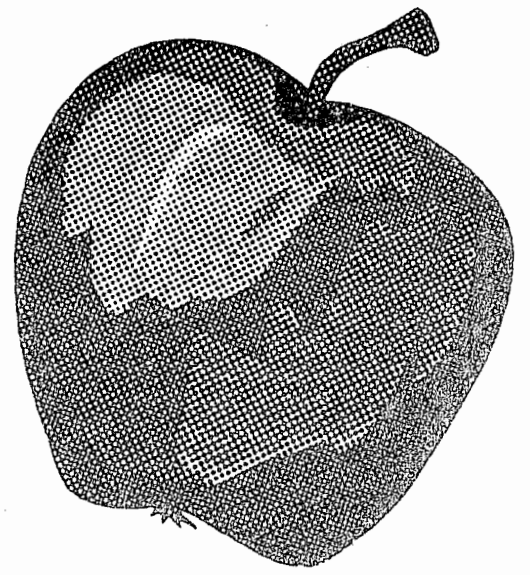


FLIPPING OUT: Rudy's co-owners Robert Esshaki (left) and Chris Thomas (right) toss dough for their home-baked pizza, one of the great favorites of market customers. Thomas' pizza crust flies high, at top right.



RUDY'S BURNED DOWN in 1939 after a fire which started in the Clarkston Venetian Blind Company consumed it and two other buildings. Rudy couldn't get insurance because the blind company had so many fires. He began again in the Township Hall.



Folks say R

BY EILEEN OXLEY
Clarkston News Staff Writer

It's a lazy August day on Main Street. Summertime is almost over and people stroll or ride bicycles, taking advantage of what could be one of the last delightful days of the season.

Clarkston Middle School seventh-graders Ryan Cross, Greg Briggs and Ben Lawrence and their friend Joshua Leake, a fifth-grader from Clarkston Elementary, burst into Rudy's Market and talk in hushed but excited tones as they sort their pennies, nickels and dimes. Outside their bikes rest against the old stone walls.

After a few moments, the four youths walk up to cashier Kendra Caputo and plunk their purchased goods — Starburst Fruit Chews, Certs, Mounds and other candies — on the counter. The boys make a stop here every day, they say, for pizza and pop.

"We buy pizza — it's really good," said Ben, as Joshua devoured a cheesy slice.

Apparently, Rudy's has always been the kind of down-home market you could count on, whether it be to pick up some grub or pass the time of day.

"People say, 'I've been coming in here for 30 years,'" said Caputo as she packed some muffins, rustling the brown paper bag. "A lot of people rave about the [home-baked] bread and pizza. And a lot of people come here for lunch."

Clarkston resident Bob Jones is one of those people.

In fact, Jones knew Rudy, or the late Rudolf Schwarze, all his life.

"Rudy came [to Clarkston] about 1932 after I came in '31," said Jones, 80, a former president of Clarkston State Bank (now NBD on Main) who retired 22 years ago.

"Rudy's was the old-type store ... Rudy was a German, you know, and he knew how to work. He'd be at the store at 4:30 or 5 a.m. and stay until midnight. Work, work, work — that's all he did. And he was a good-hearted guy. He donated merchandise all the time. He was always around to help us out. He had that old-time way of doing business; everyone had a charge account."

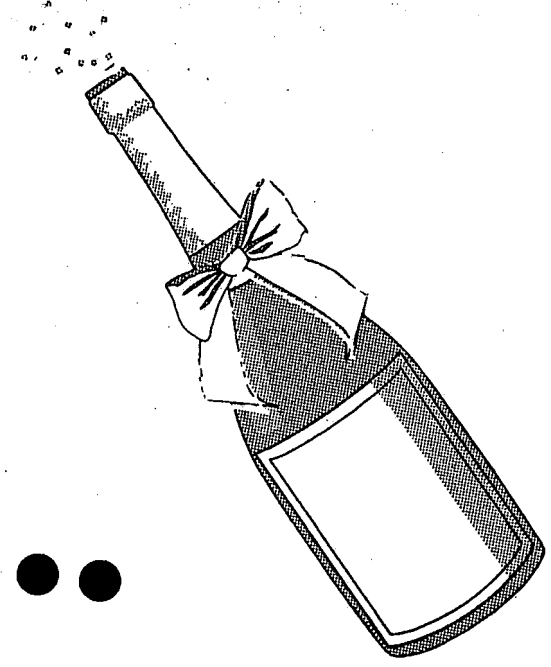
Jones fondly recalled Rudy as "short, pudgy, happy-go-lucky and wearing a hat so as to keep his hair out of the meat.

"He always seemed to have a lot of money in his pocket."

One of those times was when Clarkston's Rotary Club and Jaycees played their annual game of poker.

"He (Rudy) never gambled, but he'd just stand around, see, while those of us stupid guys did. And it would be, 'Rudy, can I borrow $100 or $200?' And

To Market, To Market ...



udy's has always been a part of Clarkston.

the next day, there would be a long line, 5-10 guys, at my bank, taking money out and paying him back," he chuckled.

But Jones also remembered, more grimly, the many moves Rudy had to make to relocate his store. The old-world German, he said, never gave up.

Rudy's first market was in a building located at the southwest corner of Washington and Main, which is now the Clarkston News' and other businesses' parking lot.

"He was renting that building for $25 a month," said Jones.

In 1939 the Clarkston Venetian Blind Co. caught fire when some lacquer and thinner ignited. Three frame buildings, including Rudy's, which stood in front of it, were destroyed.

"He had to move to the Township Hall down on the corner, and then he finally came up to the grist mill (which is now a real estate office at the corner of Main and Depot)."

It was there Rudy conducted business until 1954, when he moved to the present location at 9 S. Main, an historic fieldstone building constructed by Fred Owen and Casper Warden around the turn of the century, according to Sue Basinger, Clarkston Historic District Commission chair.

"Then it was a Ford auto dealorship," said Basinger.

Today, Rudy's co-owners Robert Esshaki and Chris Thomas follow tradition. They seem to want to please their customers above all else. After all, that's good business — an approach very similar to that of Rudolf Schwarze.

Which is why Esshaki's and Thomas' ears perk up when customers ask for vegetarian pizza, or low-cal muffins and fat-free deli-salads.

Esshaki, 25, tall and tennis-shoed, whisks his lean frame back and forth from deli to counter to floor to office, constantly.

"Everybody kind of does everything," he said, after he finally had a chance to plop down in his office chair.

The men employ about 18 people between stock persons, clerks and deli- and meat-counter workers. They like to hire high-schoolers because, Esshaki says, with a laugh, "it keeps us young."

Esshaki says he bought Rudy's after his former partner and cousin John Esshaki was having lunch across the street at the Clarkston Cafe and saw a "for sale" sign in the window. Robert took the market over in May 1990 and "Chris (his third cousin) bought into it five or six months ago."

The cousins say they are "a big, close-knit Italian family" and have worked at family stores in Detroit, Sterling Heights and Farmington Hills.

"Clarkston is by far the best. It's a great atmosphere in which to work because it's a family-oriented community," Esshaki said.

Since the two have owned Rudy's, they say they have changed it from a primarily meat-and-grocery store into "a small Papa Joe's," said Esshaki. Now, Rudy's has expanded and features gourmet salads in the deli, an imported beer selection, "great pizza", a bakery and catering for barbecues, weddings and parties.

"We bought Hallman's [Apothecary] liquor license, so now you can buy liquor," smiled the quieter Thomas, 23, who is shorter, rounder and doe-eyed.

Esshaki and Thomas say they have no plans to stop growing and pleasing their customers. They share visions of an expanded produce section, a cappuccino machine, a kitchen for gourmet take-outs and a grill so they can serve "hamburgers, kabobs and falafel sandwiches.

"People have seen only 10 percent of what we're going to do," said Esshaki.

And, as Rudy did years ago, the current owners say they like to also "give it back." They donate fine wine to auctions, sponsor school basketball teams and are very involved with SCAMP as well as other charities and organizations.

"We either donate or give it to them at cost," said Esshaki.

Up at the front are a long line of customers, picking up butteryParmesan loaves of just-baked garlic bread. It's fragrant aroma steals through Rudy's glass doors and out to Main Street, enticing more customers in.

At the back are hungry people who are just getting out of work. They want their kabobs and chicken breasts for tonight's dinner.

And down the aisles are folks with quizzical faces, trying to find that special brand of tomato paste they used in last week's spaghetti sauce. What was that name again?

It's time for the two men to get back to work.

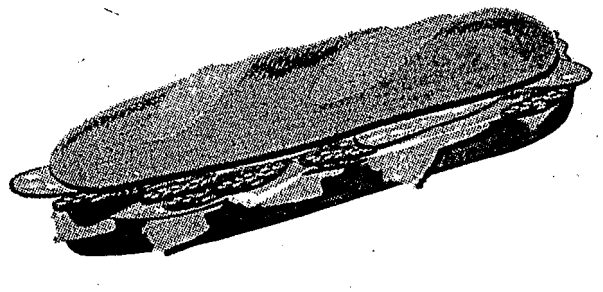
"It's hectic at times. That's part of coming to work, you know," said Thomas, as he motioned to the gathering customers.

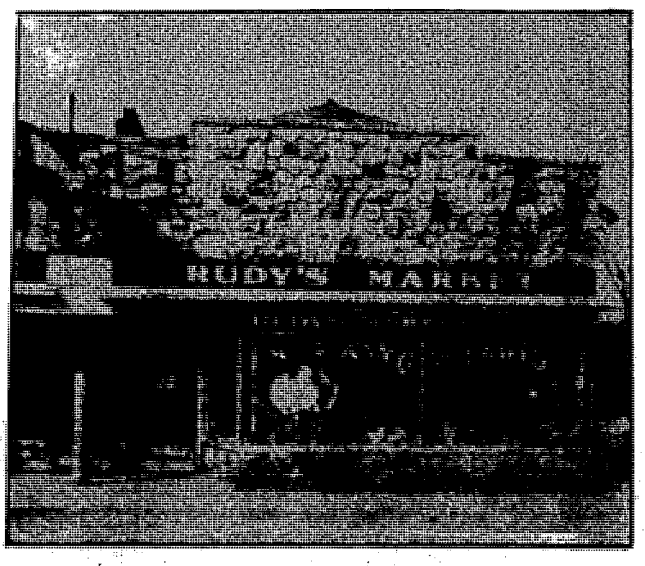
"I love it — it's in my blood," said Esshaki, scurrying again.

"Like my father always told me, 'You never make money in your office. You always make money on your floor.'"



RUDY'S ORIGINAL STORE, shown in 1933, was where Rudolf Schwarze first set up shop at the southwest corner of Washington and Main Streets. Old pictures are reprinted with permission from the Clarkston Community Historical Society.





RUDY'S IN 1942: The market moved again, this time to the site of the old grist mill at Depot and Main Streets, until its present location at 9 S. Main.